

THE BUNNY STORIES.

THE BUNNIES' PICNIC.

BY JOHN H. JEWETT.

PART I.



Cuddledown's birthday was in June, and June, the month of roses, was coming in a few weeks.

Then the Bunnies were to have a picnic, if all were well and the weather was fine.

They were fond of picnics and liked to have them a long way off from home.

Now there were plenty of green fields and pleasant groves near by Runwild Terrace, but the Bunnies thought the best part of a picnic was the going away from a noisy neighborhood, in search of new places to ramble in for the day, and the having dinner out-of-doors.

They were always glad to come home again when the day's fun was over, but they really loved the quiet and strangeness of the woods and fields, and knew how pleasant it was to find some wild place, where they could play that all the world was their own, to be good and happy in for a little while, all by themselves.

There never seemed to be any room in such places for naughty thoughts or actions, and they always came home so full of fresh air and sunshine that the good feeling would last for several days, in spite of the little trials and tempers which might come peeping around the corners of their work or play at home.

For a long time after those sad and anxious days when Cuddledown was missing, the Bunnies felt rather timid about going very far away from the village alone.

They used to talk about the strange creatures, with smooth, white faces, who carried Cuddledown

off to the settlement where Cousin Jack had found her, and they often wondered if they should ever meet them in the fields when berrying or having a picnic.

Bunnyboy was the captain of a soldier company, made up of a dozen or more of his playmates, and Cousin Jack called them his "Awkward Squad"; but they looked very grand in their blue flannel uniforms, bright crimson sashes and gilt buttons, and they felt and talked almost as grand as they looked.

Sometimes they talked rather boastfully about what they would do, when they were grown up and had real guns instead of wooden ones, if the strangers ever came to molest them at the Terrace.

One day when Bunnyboy and his soldiers were talking very bravely about this matter, the Deacon asked Bunnyboy if they had ever practiced "Right-about face, Double-quick, March!"

Bunnyboy saw the twinkle in his father's eyes, and replied: "Oh, you think we would run at the first sight of the smooth-faces, do you?"

The Deacon smiled and said he hoped not, but the bravest soldiers were usually modest as well as brave, and perhaps Cousin Jack would tell them a story some time about two dogs he once heard of, whose names were "Brag" and "Holdfast."

Cousin Jack answered him by saying: "The dog story is all right so far as it goes, but my advice to them is to keep right on thinking brave thoughts, for such thoughts have the right spirit, and are good company for old or young."

"It would hardly pay," said he, "to grow up at all, if we did not love our homes and country enough to be willing to defend them with our lives, if necessary."

Brownny, who carried the flag, waved his staff and said, "Just you wait until we are bigger and have swords and guns, and see if we do not teach the smooth-faces a lesson."

"Brownny," said Cousin Jack, "I hope by that time guns will be out of fashion, for real courage does not depend so much on swords and guns as some folks imagine."

"Perhaps," said he, "the smooth-faces are not so bad as they seem to us, and they may have meant no wrong by taking Cuddledown with them

to the settlement. They might have left her to starve and perish alone, and then we should have lost her altogether."

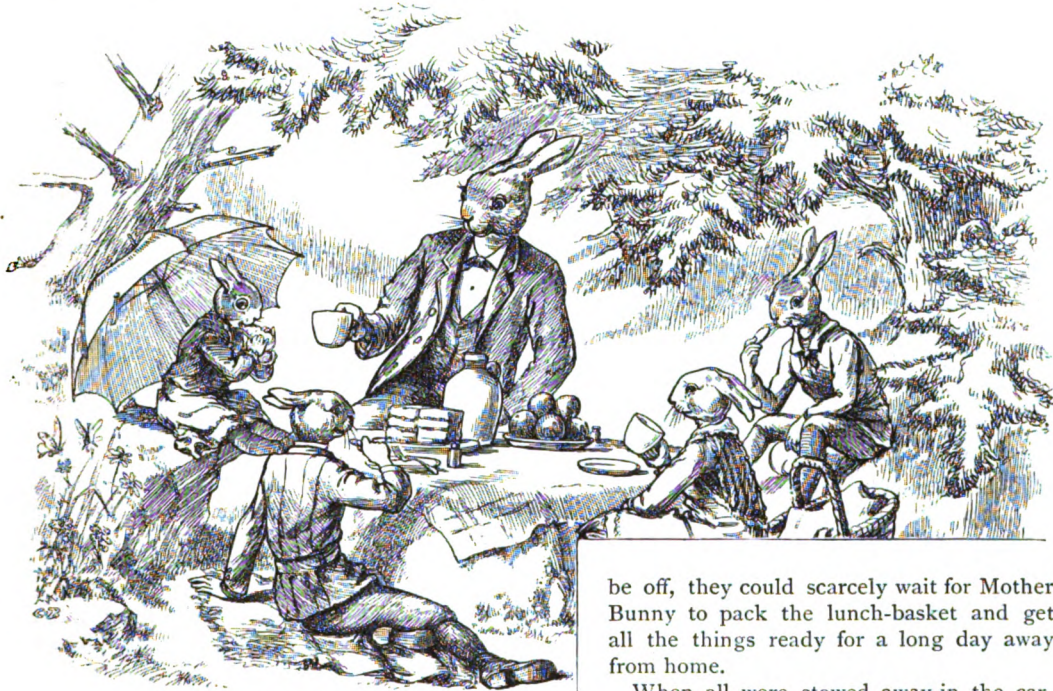
"A brave spirit and a revengeful spirit," he continued, "are two very different things, and you should be careful, Brownny, not to get them mixed. However, it is now time for you all to go on with your drilling."

Turning to the company, Cousin Jack looked

morning the near neighbors knew that something was to happen, by the noise the Bunnies were making.

They were all up with the sun, and Cuddledown had to be kissed six times by each member of the family, and each had a pretty card or gift for her birthday.

After breakfast, when Gaffer brought the family carriage to the door, they were in such a hurry to



THE PICNIC.

them over very carefully and said, "Keep your shoulders straight,—eyes to the front,—keep step to the music and—obey your commander!"

"Attention! company, forward, MARCH!" shouted Bunnyboy, and off they tramped, looking so brave and manly that even the Deacon clapped his hands and cried, "Bravo! they are a plucky lot, that is a fact, and I am proud of them."

So many months had passed, during which nothing had been seen or heard of the strangers, that the Bunnies began to feel less timid, and to wish they might see some of the places Cousin Jack and Cuddledown had passed on their journey.

Cousin Jack told them it would be a pleasant drive, and if the Deacon would let them take the horse and carriage for the picnic party, they would go that way when the time came.

Even a few weeks seemed a long time to wait, but at last the day came, and very early one bright

be off, they could scarcely wait for Mother Bunny to pack the lunch-basket and get all the things ready for a long day away from home.

When all were stowed away in the carriage, and the four Bunnies were seated, Cousin Jack took the reins, while Brownny shouted "All aboard!" and with a rousing "Good-bye!" to the father and mother, off they started, as merry as larks in a meadow.

The fields and lanes were all so lovely they could not help stopping on the way to pick a handful of the golden buttercups and fragrant lilacs, while all around them in the trees and hedges the birds were filling the air with melody, and seemed to be inviting everybody to come out and enjoy the fine weather.

After a pleasant drive of more than two hours, they came to the "two roads," and found the very spot where Cousin Jack had slept the first night of his journey, and from which he first saw the lights in the settlement.

They could just see, from the top of a hill near by, the white church-spires glistening in the sun, but they did not wish to go any nearer.

The Bunnies were not really afraid, for Cousin Jack was with them, but they were glad when he said they would drive back by the other road and have their picnic nearer home.

On the way, about noon-time, they came to a place where there was a busy little brook, and a shining pond half covered with lily-pads, and an open pasture with many large, flat stones scattered about in the short grass, just right for resting-places.

Cousin Jack said they could not find a better place, for close by on a little knoll was a grove of pine-trees, near enough together to make it shady and cool, and not too thick for playing hide-and-seek.

Under the trees the ground was covered with a soft clean mat of last year's dry pine-needles, making the nicest kind of a couch to lie upon and watch the stray sunbeams peeping through the branches overhead.

The lunch-baskets were hung on a low limb of a pine-tree, so that the busy little ants and other creeping things need not be tempted to meddle with the Bunnies' dinner, and so it might be out of reach of any stray dog that might be roving about.

When Cousin Jack had tied the horse in a safe place, and given him a feed of oats in a nose-bag, the Bunnies ran off to play, and had great fun racing about the fields, looking for turtles on the edges of the pond, or making tiny boats of birch-bark, on which they wrote pleasant messages to send down the brooks to any one who might chance to find them lodged or floating on the stream below.

While they were playing by the pond, they heard a strange croaking noise, and found that it came from two large green frogs, half hidden in the drift-wood lodged against some overhanging bushes on the bank.

Little Cuddledown said she thought the frogs must be learning to talk, and asked what they were trying to say. Just for fun, Bunnyboy told her it sounded as if one of them was saying :

"Get the lunch! Get the lunch!
Eat it up! eat it up!"

and the other frog answered :

"Me the jug! Me the jug!
Ker chug!"

This made them all feel hungry, and Cuddledown thought it was time to be going back to the tree, before the frogs found the baskets with the sandwiches and cakes and the jug of milk the mother had packed up so carefully for their dinner.

So they all ran back to the grove and helped Cousin Jack to spread out the dinner on the top of a large flat rock, where they could all sit around as

if at a table, and make it seem like having a real home dinner in the open air.

After dinner they packed up the dishes in the basket, and all the broken bits and crumbs that were left over were scattered about on the ground, so that the little bugs might have a picnic too, all by themselves, under the leaves and grass.

Cousin Jack thought Cuddledown had played so hard that she must be tired and sleepy, and spreading a lap-robe under the trees they lay down to take a nap, while the others wandered away in search of fresh flowers to take home in the baskets.

By and by, when they came back to the grove, Bunnyboy had an armful of fragrant wild azaleas and hawthorn blossoms; Pinkeyes had a huge bouquet of buttercups and pretty grasses, and Brownny a lovely bunch of delicate blue violets. These he had wrapped in large, wet leaves to keep the tender blossoms from losing all their dainty freshness before he could give them to his mother.

It was now time to think about driving back to the village, and presently, when the baskets, and flowers, and Bunnies were all snugly stowed away in the carriage again, they started off for home, waving good-bye with their handkerchiefs to the pleasant grove, while the nodding tree-tops and swaying branches answered the salute in their own graceful way.

As they drew near the outskirts of the village, and were passing through a shady lane, they heard voices in the distance, which seemed to come from behind the hill at the right of the road.

The voices soon changed to cries for help, and tying the horse by the roadside they hurried to the top of the hill, where a strange and startling sight was before them.

PART II.

NEAR the foot of the hill was a pine grove and a gently sloping field, very much like the one the Bunnies had left, and beyond was a low marsh, or peat meadow, overgrown with low bushes and tufts of rank grasses.

Huddled together near the edge of the marsh was a group of frightened little ones, evidently another picnic-party, but in trouble.

Out in the marsh someone was clinging to the bushes, waving her hand and calling for help, while a few feet beyond they could see a small object, which looked like the head and shoulders of a child, slowly sinking into the bog.

Cousin Jack knew at a glance what had happened, and telling Bunnyboy and Brownny to follow him, and Pinkeyes to look after the group below, he led the way, as fast as he could run, to the nearest rail-fence.

Loosening the rails, he told the Bunnies to drag

them along one at a time, and then hurried as fast as his crutches would carry him to the edge of the marsh.

The Bunnies were close behind him with a stout rail, and laying down his crutches he crept out as far as he could safely go, dragging the rail after him, until he was within a few feet of the sinking child.

Then he pushed the rail over the yielding and treacherous quagmire to the little fellow and told him to put his arms over it, hang on, and stop struggling.

The Bunnies soon had two more rails within reach, and these Cousin Jack pushed alongside the other, making a kind of wooden bridge, or path, over which he crawled, and at last by main strength

The first thing to do was to wash off some of the wet black mud at the brook, and wrap up the shivering Tumblekins in shawls and blankets, to keep him from taking cold.

Miss Fox's feet were wet and covered with mud, but she was so busy looking after the others that she did not mind that; and soon, with the help of the Bunnies, the baskets and wraps were picked up and they all set out for home.

It was not very far to the village, but the Bunnies said they would walk and let some of the tired little ones ride in the carriage.

Cousin Jack agreed to this plan and loaded both seats full of the smallest orphans, and with Cuddledown by his side, drove off at the head of the procession, while the rest trudged on behind.



THE BUNNIES TO THE RESCUE.

pulled the half-buried child out of the soft, wet mire.

In a few minutes, both had safely crept back over the rails to the solid ground.

Meanwhile, the grown person who was clinging to the bushes, had succeeded in pulling her feet out of the mire by lying down, and, imitating Cousin Jack's example, had crept out of the marsh and joined Pinkeyes and Cuddledown in quieting the little ones, who were crying in their fright and helplessness.

A few words explained it all. They were a party of little orphan Bears, Coons, Woodchucks, 'Possums, Squirrels, and Rabbits from the Orphans' Home in the village, and had come out for a picnic with Miss Fox, one of the matrons of the Home.

Toddle Tumblekins Coon, the little fellow Cousin Jack had saved from being buried alive in the bog, had strayed away in search of flowers and become helplessly mired in one of the soft spots in the marsh.

In going to his rescue, the matron had also been caught in a bog-hole, and but for the timely help of Cousin Jack and the Bunnies, both might have lost their lives.

When they reached the Orphanage the Bunnies said good-bye to their new friends and were invited by Miss Fox to come and see the children at home, some day, and meet the other matrons, who would be glad to thank them for all their kindness.

It was nearly dusk before the Bunnies reached home, and they were all so eager to tell about the day's doings and the strange accident in the marsh that they all tried to talk at once.

Mother Bunny said they must be hungry after such a long day, and so much excitement, but after supper she would be glad to hear all about it and enjoy the picnic at second hand.

The Deacon said he would join in the same request, if they would take turns in talking, instead of turning the tea-table into a second Babel, and Cousin Jack said something which sounded like a subdued "Amen."

By the time they had finished supper, however, Cousin Jack and Bunnyboy had told the general story of the day, in answer to the Deacon's questions, and as they gathered about the library-table for the evening, each of the other Bunnies had something to tell of the day's happenings, and of what the orphans had said to them on the way home.

Cuddledown told how the little Squirrel orphan, who sat next to her on the front seat with Cousin Jack, had said she had a dolly with real hair and asked whether Cuddledown had ever seen one.

"I almost laughed," said Cuddledown, "and was going to tell her I had half a dozen dollies at home, but I did not. I only told her I had a

you to let me have an afternoon out, just as the cook has for her own, every week, and then I will be one of the visitors."

"I know lots of stories," said Pinkeyes, "and I should like to help those little orphans to forget that they have no fathers and mothers, and no homes of their own, like ours."

The Deacon smiled as he said, "That will all come about in good time, my dear, I am sure, for I have had hard work to keep your mother away from the Orphanage, long enough to let the children there have a quiet season of the measles, between her visits."

Cousin Jack looked at the Deacon as he said, "Kindness seems to be a family trait on the mother's side, in this household, and I hope we may all be able to bear up a little longer under our part of the burden"; and then, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, he turned and said, "Your turn now, Brownny."

Brownny began by saying he had great fun racing with a young 'Possum who said his other name was "Oliver."

Cousin Jack said that Oliver was probably a favorite name in that family, and perhaps that was the reason it was usually written "O-possum."

The Deacon pretended to groan and said, "Oh! please give Brownny a chance to tell his story, and finish up this picnic before morning, for I am getting sleepy."

Then Brownny said the little fellow was about his size, and wore a sailor-suit, just like the pretty one he had worn the summer before.

A funny thing about the jacket was that it had on the right shoulder the same kind of a three-cornered mended place that his own had, and he wondered if Oliver had tumbled out of a cherry-tree, as he himself did when he tore his jacket.

Then he asked his mother what had become of his sailor-suit.

The Deacon looked over to Mother Bunny and slyly said he was beginning to understand why it was that a suit of clothes never lasted more than one season in that family, and why their children never had anything fit to wear left over from last year.

Mother Bunny blushed a little as she replied: "Our children outgrow *some* of their clothing, Father, and it seems a pity not to have it doing somebody some good. You knew very well," said she, "when we sent the bundle last spring, even if you did not know all that was inside."

Cousin Jack remarked that he saw a load of wood going over there about that time, and if his memory was not at fault the Deacon was driving and using the bundle of clothing for a seat.



dolly with real hair, too, and that my dolly's name was Catharine."

"Why did you not tell her you had more dolls?" asked Cousin Jack.

"Because—because I thought perhaps she had only one, and I did n't wish to make her feel unhappy," said Cuddledown.

Mother Bunny drew Cuddledown close to her side and said, "That was a good reason, dear, and I am glad my little daughter is growing up to be kind and thoughtful of others."

Then the Deacon said, "Next," and Pinkeyes told them all about the pleasant talk she had with two little sister Coons who walked with her.

They told her how they lived at the Home, about their lessons and singing in the morning, learning to sew and playing games in the large hall in the afternoon, or taking pleasant walks with the "Aunties," as they called the kind matrons who took care of them.

They both told her they liked "Visitors' day" the best of all in the week, for then the kind young ladies came and told them stories, or read about the pretty pictures in books they brought.

When Pinkeyes finished her story she said to Mother Bunny, "When I am old enough I shall ask

Brownny asked if it really was his suit that Oliver was wearing, and his mother said it probably was the same one, for she sent it in the bundle with the other things, although she was almost ashamed to do so, because the mended place showed so plainly.

Cousin Jack smiled at Brownny and said, "You ought to be thankful you have such a kind mother to help to hide the scars left by your heedlessness, but how about the other little chap who did not fall out of a tree, but has to wear your patches for you?"

Brownny did not answer, for he remembered how it happened. He had nearly ruined a young cherry-tree, besides tearing his jacket, by trying to get the fruit without waiting for a ladder as he had been told to do. Turning again to the Deacon, Cousin Jack said, "It seems to me you might make a good Sunday-school talk on the subject of second-hand clothes. I have seen," he continued, "large families where the outgrown garments were handed down from older to younger until the patches and stains left for the last one to wear would have ruined the reputation, if not the disposition, of a born angel."

The Deacon said he would think about it, for it was rather unfair to the orphans to label them with the ink-stains and patches, and other signs of untidiness or carelessness, which really belonged to the Bunnies themselves.

"Well, well," said Cousin Jack, "perhaps when you get the subject well warmed-over for the Sunday-school children, you can season it with a few remarks to the grown folks, who may be a little

careless in handing down their second-hand habits of fault-finding, ill temper, and other failings, for their children to wear and be blamed for all their lives."

The Deacon coughed, and as he saw Bunnyboy trying to hide a yawn with his hand, he asked him what he was trying to say.

Bunnyboy replied that he was not saying anything, but was trying to keep awake by thinking about how Tumblekins looked before they washed him in the brook.

"From his shoulders to his heels," said he, "Tumblekins was plastered with black mud so thick that you could not see whether his clothing was patched or whole."

"I felt sorry for him," continued Bunnyboy, "but he looked so comical I could not help laughing."

Brownny said he hoped the little fellow had another of his suits to put on at the Home, and he guessed Tumblekins would n't mind wearing a patch or two, rather than to be sent to bed until the soiled suit was washed and dried.

Brownny's remark reminded Mother Bunny that it was getting late, and long past the Bunnies' bedtime, and, as Cuddledown had been fast asleep in her arms for half an hour, she said they ought not to sit up any longer.

So they all said "Good-night," and went to bed, tired but happy, and thankful, too, that they had so happy and so comfortable a home, all their own, with Father and Mother and Cousin Jack to share it with them.

(To be continued.)



FIVE CENTS' WORTH OF FUN.